

On heathcliff's revenge

Literature, British Literature



On Heathcliff's Revenge I. Introduction Emily Bronte is a genius in the history of English literature. In her short life, she completed a novel and 193 poems. Wuthering Heights is her only novel and is regarded as one of the most fascinating and most singular English novels; it is the complete embodiment of an intensive individual apprehension of the nature of man and life. The novel is a faithful portrayal of life, a fierce criticism of society, and a penetrating exploration of humanity. It is also a realistic story of the relations between the oppressor and the oppressed and of spiritual values, which are embodied in the characters, especially in the hero Heathcliff. Heathcliff is the hero of the novel, the word "Heathcliff" is made up of "heath" and "cliff", means "areas of flat unused land, esp. if covered with heath" and "steep face of the rock, at the edge of the sea". Author gave the hero such name; obviously, she has a special feeling towards the hero. Being the villain of the tale, Heathcliff is regarded the most horrid character on the stage of literature. He manipulates everyone else but himself. His rotten nature can be traced back to his early years when he was a poor, fatherless child. The lack of parental love and guidance made his life a difficult one. Heathcliff was an unwanted child who brought disorder to a previously happy household. Instead of rising from his poor position, he degenerated into an evil beast. By Heathcliff's tragic revenge, Emily expressed her attitude towards society, embodied her outlook on life.

II. Brief Introduction of Heathcliff's Revenge

Wuthering Heights is a novel of revenge. The hero Heathcliff is regarded as a devil. Since he was young, his heart was full of hate and when he grew up, he worked all his life to revenge. The determination of revenge even made him being so little interested in his life. Why did he live like a devil instead of

enjoying the peace of his life? In this part, I want to give a brief introduction of the bitter life experience and the doomed tragic fate of Heathcliff.

2. 1 Tolerance Heathcliff was a founding in the street of Liverpool. Mr. Earnshaw saw that he is "staring, and houseless, and as good as dumb", sympathized with him, and took him back his home. In Mr. Earnshaw's family, though Mr. Earnshaw loved him, his daughter Catharine was thick with him; his wife was ready to fling him out of the door, his son Hindley even hate him because he regarded Heathcliff as "a usurper of his father's affections and his privileges", so did the servant-girl of the family, Nelly Dean. They "plagued and went on with him shamefully and the mistress never put in a word on his behalf, when she saw him wronged." After Earnshaw died, Hindley degraded him in every he could, "drove him from their company, to the servants, deprived him of the instruction of the curate, and insisted that he should labor out of the doors indeed; compelling him, to do so as hard as any other lad on the farm." Heathcliff tolerated these ill-treatments for he still had a hope-the sincere love between him and Catherine. Heathcliff falls passionately in love with Catherine, Hindley's sister, who loves him but thinks it would degrade her to marry him. Heathcliff, finding it impossible for him to be united to Catherine, leaves Wuthering Heights. Three years later, he returns, becoming a rich man, but finds that Catherine has been married Edgar Linton, a weakling. Heathcliff's character is truly tragic because his mean disposition is a result of not getting the love that everyone deserves. Thus, he buries the seed of hatred deep in his heart.

2. 2 Revolt Upon his return to the Heights, Heathcliff becomes a cruel and unfeeling demon. As he seeks his revenge, he is so fiendish and is constantly associated with

diabolical feelings, images and actions. First he gains possession of Wuthering Heights from his old enemy Hindley by making him sign the house over to him as payment for gambling debts. He marries Isabella, the simple and infatuated sister of Edgar Linton and treated her badly. Isabella recognizes the sadistic treatment from Heathcliff and asks " Is Mr. Heathcliff a man? Is he the devil? " His cruelty is also evident when he hangs Isabella's dog . Meanwhile, Catherine has fallen ill and Heathcliff has to face the fact that his only friend and his only reason to live are about to die. The day Catherine dies she gives birth to a girl, Cathy Linton. After the death of Catherine, Heathcliff's lust for love is gone. His existence is then focused totally on exacting revenge. Heathcliff's revenge even visited upon the next generation. He mistreats Hareton, Hindley's son, in much the same way he has been mistreated. To revenge on Hindley Earnshaw's being cruel to him, Heathcliff determines to make Hindley's son Hareton a brute. He never teaches him how to read or write, never criticize him for any bad habits and never lead him a single step toward virtue. When Heathcliff later become master of Wuthering Heights, he reduces Hareton to a mere house servant and deprived him of any wages. Edgar's daughter Cathy is forced to marry Heathcliff's sickly son Linton. Through his son, Heathcliff means to usurp Edgar Linton's property at Thrushcross Grange and get Cathy's fortune. The heirs (Cathy Linton, Hareton Earnshaw, and Linton) strive to escape from the bitter revilement of the previous generation. In order to attain his goal, Heathcliff utilized every opportunity, even his marriage, wife and son. His action reflected his disfigured character. Heathcliff is a person tasting to the full bitterness of life, sincere to his love all his life. So, though his revenge is

cruel, we still sympathize this person. 2. 3 Despair In the final chapters of the novel, he is torn between two competing passions, that for revenge and that for sympathy and fondness for Hareton. Finally he possesses no ability to prevent the future happiness of the younger generation and deprived of his passion, dies. When Heathcliff gives up his plan for revenge, he meets Catherine in death and truly becomes happy once again. Actually, love is all in Heathcliff's mind, the misery of losing love " was a strange way to killing, not by inches but fractious of hairbreadth". Without his love, he also lost all hope of life. As Heathcliff approaches death and a reunion of Catherine, he confesses to Nelly the extent of Catherine's hold over him, though she's now been dead for 18 years. Heathcliff never finds peace through his revenge. In fact, the only time he truly finds happiness is when he gives up his plan for revenge. His resolve for revenge weakens until he no longer has an interest in that former situation: " I have lost the faculty of enjoying their destruction. " Heathcliff places himself on the side of evil, in the novel, he is the spirit of revolt, and Emily expresses her great sympathy for Heathcliff. She writes at the very end of her novel: " He seemed to smile; I could not think him dead. He was perfectly still...because he had finally received himself of all his suffering. " III. The Deep Roots of Heathcliff's Revenge Revenge is not from nowhere. It must have specific reasons. As far as the novel is concerned, there are three major reasons joined together to contribute to the horrible fates of Heathcliff. 3. 1 Love and Hatred We all know that, love is one thing that is pure and beautiful. In Wuthering Heights, the love between Heathcliff and Catherine seems to go beyond what most people know. In fact it is as if their love is beyond this world, belonging to a spiritual plane that supersedes

anything available to everyone else on Earth. Heathcliff's revenge is mainly caused by his extreme love to Catherine and also Catherine's betrayal of him.

3. 1. 1 Sincere Love between Heathcliff and Catherine Heathcliff, the waif picked up in the streets of Liverpool, is treated kindly by old Mr. Earnshaw, but insulted and degraded by Hindley. After the death of Mr. Earnshaw, Hindley reduces the boy to the status of a servant. The situation is vividly described in Catherine's dairy, which Mr. Lockwood finds in her bedroom. We should not regard them simply as naughty children disrupting the order of the household. The affinity between Heathcliff and Catherine is forged in rebellion, which determines the nature of their relationship. Catherine and Heathcliff have faith in their love with one another. They both believe that they have their being in the other. Catherine once told Nelly that: " Nelly, I am Heathcliff-he's always, always in my mind-not as a pleasure any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being...he's more myself than I am". Heathcliff's love for Catherine takes a vicious and repulsive form in Wuthering heights. Due to Heathcliff's obsession with Catherine he destroys all those around him to make those who " have" Catherine miserable. Heathcliff's love for Catherine is shown through his devotion to her in her last moments of life. From what he says: " Oh Cathy! Oh, my life! How can I bear it? " " You know that I could as soon as forget you as my existence! Is it not sufficient for your infernal selfishness, that while you are at peace I shall write in the torments of hell? " Heathcliff gives us a glimpse of the true depth of his love toward Catherine. But his love for Catherine is not satisfied by him being with her. His love turns into a sick and demented feeling that can only be satisfied by the suffering of those

around him who are related. As Nelly tells Catherine and Heathcliff's story, she criticizes both of them harshly, condemning their passion as immortal. But, to the reader, this passion is obviously one of the most compelling and memorable aspects of the book.

3. 1. 2 Betrayal of Catherine

However, Catherine's decision to marry Edgar made Heathcliff fall into the greatest misery and reduced him to a state of degradation, which was far more terrible than the pain of his boyhood. Catherine's greed for wealth, status and power made her selfishly abandon Heathcliff who then turned aside blindly from the path of freedom and openness and cast himself in the iron mold of revenge. The betrayal of Catherine was that she loved Heathcliff but married Edgar. Her marriage is the central fact on which the whole design of the book depends. She married the one she did not love instead of the one she loved, because her choice of Heathcliff would mean frustration and waste, as she said herself: " it would degrade me to marry Heathcliff, now, " while her choice of Edgar would mean something very different: " he is handsome, and pleasant to be with...because he is young and cheerful... because he loves me...he will be rich...I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighborhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband. " This explanation by Catherine showed that she will marry Edgar because he is rich and handsome not because she loves him. Their love exists on a higher or spiritual plane. They are soul mates, two people who have an affinity for each other which draws them together irresistibly. Heathcliff repeatedly calls Catherine his soul. Such a love is not necessarily fortunate or happy. Their love is a life-force relationship, which is a principle that is not conditioned by anything but itself. In conclusion, Heathcliff and Catherine will always love

each other. And because they both love each other so much, it takes them to the worst place of all, their death.

3. 2 The Social Class Conflict

The unfair social system caused unequal human relationship and eventually leads to the conflict and hatred, even revenge. And conflict is foundation for Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. Much of this conflict results from a distinct division of classes and is portrayed through the way of personal relationship. The struggle between social classes roughly resembles a real-life conflict during the time.

3. 2. 1 Social Background

Wuthering Heights was published during the Industrial Revolution, a time of great economic change in which laborers fought for fair conditions in the workplace, and employers fought to defend themselves. The novel is set at a time when capitalism and industrialization are changing not only the economy but also the traditional social structure and the relationship of the classes. During the first half of the 19th century, capitalism had been fully developed. The yeoman or respectable farming class was being destroyed by the economic alliance of the newly-wealthy capitalists and the traditional power-holding gentry. The contradictions between the bourgeoisie and the feudal force had changed to the universal resistance of the working class against aristocrats. This point is discussed more fully in *Wuthering Heights* as Socio-Economic Novel. For example, the unfriendly relationship between the higher-class Lintons and the lower-class Heathcliff is very clear.

3. 2. 2 The Striving for Superiority

Emily had deep sympathy for the working masses, so by describing poverty and wealth, she exposed the way money rode on humanity in a capitalist society and also reflects the oppression of the poor, and contradictory conflicts in the England bourgeoisie society of the 19th century. For example,

Catherine's decision to marry Edgar so that she will be "the greatest woman of the neighborhood" is only the most obvious example. And the shifting nature of social status is demonstrated most strikingly in Heathcliff's orbit from homeless waif to young gentleman-by-adoption to common laborer to gentleman again, although the status-conscious Lockwood remarks that Heathcliff is only a gentleman in "dress and manners". Edgar Linton is a wealthy man of high status, and Heathcliff is poor and possesses no assets. In this situation, Catherine does not consider personal feelings, but instead, she focuses on her outward appearance to society. Catherine's decision to marry Edgar Linton rather than Heathcliff widens the gap between social classes. Even though she loves him, Catherine will not marry Heathcliff after he has been degraded, and instead marries into the rich Linton family, causing all of the major conflict in the novel. The Lintons are of a higher class both because they have more money and don't seem to have to work, and because they are better educated. When Nelly questions her as to her motives for doing so, Catherine replies, "he will be rich, and I shall like to be the greatest woman in the neighborhood". Yet when Nelly objects to this, Cathy replies, "Nelly, I see now, you think me a selfish wretch, but did it never strike you that if Heathcliff and I married, we should become beggars? Whereas, if I marry Linton, I can aid Heathcliff to rise, and place him out of my brother's power". In this way, Catherine plays the role of "assistant rebel," doing what she can to assist Heathcliff in his goal of overturning the socio-economic hierarchy of Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights. And we can also infer that not only is Cathy aware of the financial politics of middle-class marriage, she also plans to use her elevated socio-economic

status to help Heathcliff in his plans to rebel against his position. It is obviously such kind of class prejudice leads to Catherine's betrayal of love and Heathcliff's torture of humanity.

3. 3 Individual Selfishness

Another root which causes the revenge in the novel is human being's essential nature-selfishness. Selfishness was in everyone's character in some way or other. In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily held an identical view that extreme selfishness mainly comes from greed which in turn helps to make selfishness more extreme which is reflected on the tragic love between Heathcliff and Catherine, and Heathcliff's revenge.

3. 3. 1 Selfishness in Love

Heathcliff's selfishness is mostly embodied in his greedy love for Catherine. And his selfish action really causes great tragedy: Catherine is thrown out of heaven, where she feels displaced and sees herself an exile at Thrushcross Grange at the end, wandering the moors for twenty years as a ghost. Heathcliff also used his marriage with Isabella as a tool to take revenge on Catherine. His marriage made Catherine crazy, because it was intended to return his anger of being betrayed by Catherine. Heathcliff's love for Catherine, therefore, was both sincere and selfish. A complete and sincere love needed neither reason nor repay. But Heathcliff's love for Catherine was rounded on the assumption to get it returned from Catherine. If Heathcliff's love for Catherine were not self-serving, he would not have transferred his love to hatred and revenge after being abandoned by Catherine. To sum up, while Catherine's love embodied in her satisfying her greed for wealth, status and power by hurting others, Heathcliff's love embodied in his strong, violent and obligatory demand for an absolute repay from Catherine. Both loves were selfish, revealing that Catherine and Heathcliff were extremely selfish

people. " It is the self-love that sets the disastrous train of events in motion". Catherine's self-love made Heathcliff degenerate, and Heathcliff's self-love brought disasters to the two families.

3. 3. 2 Selfishness in His Revenge

However, how could we draw the conclusion that Heathcliff was selfish in his origin? It might be more reasonable to say that Heathcliff was not born evil. But again we could not thus say that he was born kind, as we have said earlier that kindness or wickedness belonged to the social feature. So where did his darkness come from? Ill-treatment from Hindley was just a kind of physical torment. And then, his final mental torment came when Catherine betrayed him for her own greed, pushing him to the crucial point where he turned and degenerated into darkness. In order to be well matched with Catherine, he became extremely greedy in full possession of the power and in a mere appetite for property. After he returned from absence, he gobbled up both the Earnshaws' and the Lintons' estates, by force and trickery. His selfishness went even crazier to the younger generation. Generally speaking, enemies were incompatible as fire and water, and it was impossible to allow their sons and daughters to get married. However, what Heathcliff did was just the opposite. He forced his son to court Edgar's daughter and forced Edgar's daughter to marry his son. His purpose was crystal clear as his son said " if he had been in my place, he would be more the master of the Grange than your father, by this time. " He sneered his son for his inability to seduce Cathy so as to become the master of the Grange. Edgar thus said that Heathcliff's purpose of forcing Cathy to marry Linton was " to secure the personal property, as well as the estate, to his son, or rather himself. " As the *dramatis personae*, Heathcliff has made his revenge most spiteful. His

mad revenge and venting of his anger seem to be out of love, but it is his distinctive traitorous spirit behind it. This is a special character shaped in a special situation; in fact, his destiny has been predicted from very beginning. He has no way to escape it. IV. Emily's Roar towards the Unfair Society Emily is also a critical realist, concerned about the fate of the common people, angry with the inhuman social institution, the decaying social and the widespread misery, poverty and injustice. *Wuthering Heights* is not just a sentimental romance novel; it is a presentation of life, an essay in love, and a glimpse at relationships. Emily also expressed her own outlook towards the society by means of the revenge of Heathcliff.

4. 1 Emily's Life Experience

Emily Bronte, the fifth child of Patrick Bronte, was born in 1818. His father was a Cambridge educated clergyman born in Ireland. When Emily was two years old, her father was appointed to a church in Haworth, a remote village in Yorkshire, and they spent most of their rest life there. When Emily was three years old, her mother died of cancer. After that, the children were left much to them and spent most of their time in reading and composition. They lived in a parsonage in Haworth with the bleak moors of Yorkshire on one side and the parish graveyard on the other. Life at home was much better for Emily and her siblings. In 1824 Mr. Bronte sent his four eldest daughters– Elizabeth, Maria, Charlotte, and Emily–to boarding school. While at school, they were frequently cold and undernourished, and Maria and Elizabeth contracted tuberculosis. Soon after being sent home to recuperate, they died. Alarmed, Mr. Bronte brought Charlotte and Emily home to be educated. Haworth was a relatively isolated community, and so the Bronte children turned to one another for amusement and companionship. As the most

independent member of a remarkable family, Emily is a woman of considerable strength, who could be both a practical housekeeper and a mystic. She was virtually a self-contained being, and what influenced her came from forces inside her rather than from the outside. And it is no wonder that those who knew her saw her extremely reserved woman. 4. 2

Emily's Revolt Reflected by Heathcliff's Revenge Emily Bronte was intense in her treatment of love and passion. The stark, passionate world created by Emily Bronte has become one of the most widely read books in the English language. As a love story it appears to run more along the lines of Romeo and Juliet, rather than Mills and Boon, where the desperate passions of the characters, necessarily ends in death. It is typical of the Romance Genre for the characters to experience a moment of self knowledge, and in this way the characters come to know themselves better through the love or actions of another person. Heathcliff's ending had such a course, which made the story readable, believable. " Emily hated the world and its ways, longs for freedom. While she found, only after one died, he can break away from bitterness and evil, get his freedom in heart, he can return to nature, his soul can be purified, till to his eternity". In Wuthering Heights, the arrangement to Heathcliff's fate symbolized such outlook on world and opinion on life and death. Emily showed her attitude towards society by trilogy of Heathcliff's fate. Emily used Heathcliff's wrench fate to express her discontent towards the society. Heathcliff's revolt is her outlet of her discontent. Heathcliff's death is her despair towards society. Emily used Heathcliff's story to tell us: tolerance is not the right way to the injustice in society, which only causes greater tragedy, people should revolt bravely. Confined by her time, Emily

could not find out the outlet for Heathcliff. So Heathcliff's sincere love is a tragedy and he had to die at last. But she gave her roar towards the unfair society. V. Conclusion Heathcliff is a rebel against the bourgeois matrimonial system—for a while Catherine is too, during her childhood. Their pure love has been crushed by the class prejudice of the bourgeoisie. So Heathcliff is at first the oppressed and decided to have his revenge on his oppressor, but in the end, having had his revenge, the oppressed turns the oppressor. Here lies the novel's theme that "a full human life in a capitalist society was impossible of attainment." No doubt, Heathcliff's tragedy rises from a world of inequality and oppression. The novel is not merely a tragic love story, but has much more significance. It is an expression of the impossibility of true love in an unjust, money-arranged society and of cruel damage to the ideal happiness. Meanwhile, Heathcliff's tragic fate reflected Emily's despair towards the society and her passive outlook on life. References B, F. Pinion. A Bronte Companion [M]. London: Penguin Group. 1984. Clayton, Jay. Romantic Vision and the Novel: Wuthering Heights. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 1987. Eagleton, Terry. Heathcliff and the Great Hunger [M]. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1995. Harold, Bloom. Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights [M]. London: Chelsea House Publishers. 2000. Walter, Allen. The English Novel [M]. New York: E. P Dutton. 1955. 1/4 ± 3/4 Ž - fæœ — ç¹. 1/4 •, ± ± ° „[Z]. æ — è< j è⁻. — ä - i 1/4 š è⁻ æž — â † ç[°] ^ ç^{3/4}. 1990. â ~ ç, 3 â - „. ã € Š è < ± â > 1/2 æ - † â | ç ® € â 2 ã € <. æ 23 â — ä ° æ ° ' â † ç[°] ^ ç^{3/4}. 1993. è '2 è < ¥ è € œ. â - 1 ã € Š â 1/4 •, ± ± ° „, ã € < â » † ä „ » é ç ~ ç š „, â Ž Ÿ â ž < â ^ † æ ž [J]. â > â • - è - â | é ™ ç é ™ ç æ Š ¥. 2002 i 1/4 ^ 5 i 1/4 % 37-40. æ — é ™ è ç œ. â fæœ — ç[°] 1 ã š â | ç " ç © ¶ [M]. â — ä - i 1/4 š ä „ â > 1/2 ç^{3/4} ä 1/4 š ç š ' â | â † ç[°] ^ ç^{3/4}. 1983. è

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